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BUTTERFLY CHASE

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A

BUTTERFLY CHASE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

P. J. STAHL.

WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY

LORENZ FRÖLICH.

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A BUTTERFLY CHASE.

I.

Yes, little Minnie and her cousin Bertie have quite made up their minds to have a splendid collection of butterflies. They have been reading all about it in a book which their

uncle, who is a professor at the Museum, has sent them. In this beautiful book they have learnt all about it—how to chase the butterflies, and how to catch them, and how to arrange them in glass cases when they are caught. Everything they want is ready for them. Their uncle has sent with the book two butterfly-nets; a pretty case filled with crooked scissors, tweezers, pincers, and all sorts of sharp steel instruments; a pretty box, at the bottom of which are little round pieces of cork, glued in rows, with long large-headed pins to run through the butterflies; and another little box, with a lot of small squares of glass, which are to be put over their wings to keep them open, and prevent them from fluttering and beating about.

In the beautiful book there are pretty coloured pictures of the fine butterflies that they may meet with in their chases, with the names of each kind printed underneath, so that they will know them all when they catch them.

How very interesting butterflies are!

II.

Minnie's mamma, who is almost like a mamma to Bertie too, though she is only his aunt, would be very glad to

see her little ones fond of natural history, but still she does not seem quite pleased with their uncle's idea in sending them, not only the pretty book, but the nets and the sharp, dreadful-looking steel things which they are to use in making their collection. She shook her head rather sadly when she saw the pretty nets which were to stop the butterflies from flying about so happily, and the pins and tweezers which were to turn them into lifeless specimens in a glass box.

But she did not wish to vex their kind uncle, who was a very learned man, and was always thinking of collections and museums, and science and experiments; and she did not like to tell him that she would rather her little ones should learn about butterflies from the book with its beautiful pictures, and from watching them flying about, and settling on the flowers in the fields; and that she did not think it could be a nice play for children to catch and kill the pretty harmless creatures.

III.

It is a beautiful day. Minnie and Bertie are all ready to start, with their light gauze nets in their hands. Bertie's

is green, and Minnie's is blue. Bertie has slung the butterfly-box, with the corks and great pins, over his shoulder. He looks quite like a sportsman.

They are going to the daisy field for their first chase; it is a beautiful meadow, full of flowers, which the butterflies are very fond of.

They say good-bye to mamma. She goes with them to the bottom of the steps. The daisy field is not far off. From the drawing-room window dear mamma will be able to see the chase. They have promised not to make themselves too hot.

IV.

Now they are off, armed with their nets. They are sure to have a splendid chase. Bertie intends to catch a dozen

peacock butterflies, and Minnie a dozen emperors. That will make twenty-four butterflies. Peacocks and emperors are the finest of all—the only butterflies they mean to catch. As soon as they reach the field the two hunters hold a consultation and arrange the plan of proceeding. Bertie will take the right side of the field, and Minnie the left. They must not come in each other's way, only if one should want help, then the other is to fly to the rescue.

V.

They waik gently along, each on the proper side, just as they agreed; for, in the first place, the grass is very high,

and that makes it difficult to run fast; and then, of course, they must not frighten the butterflies. They must go very cautiously, so as to take them by surprise.

There is a donkey in the field. He looks very much astonished at something. I think he is asking himself if the butterfly-hunters are not come to hunt him. What an absurd donkey! to think of any one hunting donkeys with a butterfly-net!

A BUTTERFLY CHASE.

VI.

Everything is blooming in the meadow, the air is full of soft murmurs, and the insects make a musical hum.

At the hunters' approach the grasshoppers hop, the bees fly off, and thousands of pale-blue or white butterflies seem to come out of the flowers. But they are too small, and there are so many of them that they do not know which to catch. Peacocks are what they want, or emperors.

Minnie finds that there are holes in the ground, hidden under the grass, which make her trip, and there are disagreeable plants growing among the daisies, which sting her legs, and even some that tear little slits in her frock — but when one goes a-hunting one must not be particular; another time she will ask for a pair of gaiters, like Bertie's, and a very thick frock. Mr. Donkey is very inquisitive.

VII.

Hush!—Bertie stops all on a sudden, and makes signs to Minnie not to stir. He must have spied a peacock. How cleverly and quietly he steals up—nearer, nearer, without the

slightest noise; he scarcely seems to breathe. Minnie would like to run across to see the beautiful peacock. Bertie holds up his net, all ready to catch the butterfly; the wind puffs the green gauze a little, and Minnie's heart beats with impatience.

The Donkey cannot conceive what the children are doing. They seem to pay no attention to him.

VIII.

All on a sudden Bertie brings down the net, and then throws himself on his hands and knees, to make sure of his success. He must have caught the butterfly. . . . .

No! there is no butterfly—nothing at all in the net but a bit of clover. Bertie seems rather unhappy about it; but I know who is happy enough—the beautiful butterfly that has had such a fortunate escape. How he soars away! However, Bertie calls out to his cousin that it was not a real peacock after all, which is some comfort.

The Donkey, seeing Bertie on all-fours, wonders whether he is mocking him, and making fun of him.

A BUTTERFLY CHASE.

IX.

Butterflies are very silly. I think the peacock cannot have noticed Minnie, for he flies very imprudently close to her. Minnie will manage much better than Bertie; yes,

indeed, she is not going to let such a beautiful butterfly get away, for he is very beautiful though he may not be a peacock.

Pat! she has got him, and very tight too, so that he cannot possibly get away under the rim.

A BUTTERFLY CHASE.

X.

'Have you got him?' cries Bertie.

'Yes, yes,' answers Minnie. 'Oh, come quick!'

Bertie runs up; but, oh, dear, the ill-natured butterfly

has made his escape through a hole in the net, which had been torn by a hedge.

He laughs at Miss Minnie, the good-for-nothing butterfly! He flies up so high, so high, that the little hunters, gazing up at him, almost tumble over on their backs.

But the Donkey is not going to waste his time in staring up into the sky, and very wisely goes back to his browsing.

XI.

'Let us lie down on the grass,' says Bertie, 'and be on the watch to take the peacock by surprise. When he cannot see any more of us, he will come down. Butterflies

are too greedy to stay up in the air very long; they want to come down to suck the honey out of the flowers.'

The two hunters hide themselves carefully, and wait for their revenge, with their nets all ready in their hands. It is a long time to wait; but if one goes a-hunting, one must have patience.

The Donkey is out of all patience, and says to himself, 'What are they going to do?' Really he is a most inquisitive donkey. He wants to know everything.

XII.

The butterfly, seeing nothing more of them, comes down by degrees. First he flies to the right, then he flies to the left, then he flies round and round.

'He can't make up his mind about anything,' says Bertie.

'And he doesn't know a bit where he is going,' says Minnie. 'He looks every minute as if he were going to stop. He seems as if he wanted a daisy, and then he goes right off to another flower.'

Oh!!! this is cool. The impudent butterfly has popped right down on Minnie's nose. At first Bertie could scarcely believe his eyes.

XIII.

Bertie never laughed so much in his life. Minnie, who certainly was not expecting anything of the kind, is so taken

by surprise that she jumps up on her feet; and the butterfly, quite as much astonished at what he has done, flies off again as quickly as before. Minnie cannot leave off rubbing her nose; the butterfly's little feet did tickle her so.

'He is a very rude butterfly,' said Minnie.

'Oh! he must have mistaken your little nose for a flower,' said Bertie. 'He did not mean to offend you. He meant to be very polite.'

XIV.

But there is no time for laughing; the butterfly has settled on a great tuft of meadow-sweet all in flower. The

two hunters, seeing this, forget all their plans, and run both together after him with all their might. But the butterfly is not so silly as to wait for them; every time he sees his two enemies come near, off he starts again. A dozen times Minnie thought she had him, and a dozen times Bertie said he had got him; but a dozen times he got away.

'What troublesome things to catch butterflies are!' said the two hunters. 'What is to be done? We have tried every possible way.'

A BUTTERFLY CHASE.

XV.

Minnie has been running so much that she is quite out of breath, and her hair has fallen all over her shoulders.

Bertie, too, is in a most uncomfortable state, and as red as a turkey-cock. Oh! how hot it is. But they cannot lose their time in standing still. They just stop for a few seconds to take breath, and then set off again. But the butterfly has got a good start, and is a long way off already.

All this time the Donkey is lying quite coolly on the grass; but he just takes a look now and then at the hunters.

XVI.

The Donkey, seeing them come quite close to him, is taken by surprise. He is quite sure now that they are

running after him. He must be a most conceited ass to suppose that two such hunters as Minnie and Bertie have nothing better to do than to hunt donkeys. He thinks so much of himself, this Donkey, that he is perfectly silly. So Bertie thinks. As for Minnie, she does not trouble herself about him at all. She can think of nothing but her butterfly.

A BUTTERFLY CHASE.

XVII.

Heigh-ho! what has happened? Bertie and Minnie, who seemed only just now to be flying over the ground, have disappeared, as if by magic.

This is how it was. Bertie and Minnie, rushing along so eagerly, did not notice that they had got to the bottom of the field; and at the bottom of the field was a ditch; and into the ditch they went head over heels, rolling one over the other.

And at the bottom of the ditch there was some water left by the rain—nasty yellow water.

XVIII.

Poor Minnie is quite frightened. Bertie has tumbled right upon her; and Bertie is so heavy. Besides, she has

got very wet, and her pretty white frock is all dirtied with the mud. It is not nice at all. Bertie helps her up, but she is half inclined to cry.

'Oh,' says Bertie, 'when we go a-hunting we must not mind such little things; we shall be sure to have plenty more of the same sort.'

Minnie begins to think she has had enough already.

XIX.

'What has become of the butterfly all this time?' cries Bertie. Who would have thought it? he is quietly settled not two yards from the spot where his enemies fell; so quiet

that one would have thought him asleep or dreaming on the tuft of beautiful blue-bells, where Bertie has just found him.

He turns his back scornfully on the hunters; just as if he had seen or heard nothing, and as if all that has happened did not concern him in the least.

Bertie hopes to have his revenge now. He pops his net down so neatly on the careless butterfly, that this time Mr. Peacock is safely caught, for there are no holes in Bertie's net.

'How he beats about!' says Bertie.

'Oh! he will spoil all his wings!' says Minnie.

XX.

Minnie, however, remembering the directions in her uncle's book, has opened the box, while Bertie holds his net tightly down on the ground. The butterfly cannot

escape. Minnie has given her cousin a great long pin, with a sharp point.

The Donkey, who had run off to some distance, comes back when he sees the hunters stop. He says to himself that something extraordinary must have happened, and he is not wrong this time.

XXI.

Bertie holds the big pin close to the quivering body of the poor butterfly. He must find the exact spot in the

middle of his back, so that the operation may not fail. He has told Minnie to put her hands flat down on the net, one on each side of the poor prisoner. The butterfly, tnus pressed, can scarcely stir; a few convulsive struggles are the only signs of his agony and his helplessness; his head, with its large eyes, can still move a little. How dreadful his eyes look; they are full of terror.

Bertie was so proud of his victory; why does he hesitate now?

XXII.

Why? Because just when he was going to put his poor prisoner *to* death, the child's heart and hand trembled—because

he looked at his cousin and saw her turn pale—because Minnie turned away her head that she might not see her cousin do this cruel deed. She felt that death was dreadful, whether it were a man's death or a butterfly's. This pin was just the same to the poor insect as a sword would be to a man. 'Oh, Bertie, Bertie!' she cried, bursting into tears; 'no, no! don't let us kill him! Only think, Bertie, it said in uncle's book that butterflies live for several days with pins run through them. Oh, how dreadful it must be! I could not bear to see it, and you could not, Bertie. It is not nice play to kill things; I don't like chasing butterflies.'

Bertie has lifted up his net.

Oh, the happy, beautiful butterfly! He thought himself just dead, and he has come back to life. One moment to shake his wings, and away he soars again in his joyous flight towards the blue sky.

Minnie throws her arms round Bertie's neck, and says, 'Oh, thank you, Bertie!' They are very happy too—good little Bertie and dear little Minnie. They know they have done right.

They will never go chasing butterflies again, never, never.

XXIII.

But from the balcony, where she was sitting, Minnie's mamma had seen them fall into the ditch, and was hastening

to them. The little hunters were so absorbed that they did not see her coming. But dear mamma understands it all, and she is very much pleased with her little children. When they are older she will explain to them that though it is not wrong for learned men to make painful experiments, in order to gain useful knowledge, no one else should wantonly destroy even the least of God's creatures.

As for the Donkey, I don't know what has become of him. I think he has given up trying to understand anything about the matter, and gone home to his stable.

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